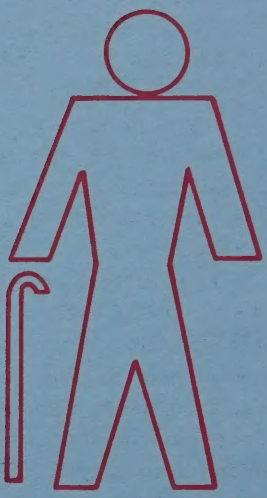

# Helping the Transportation Disadvantaged

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New Jersey
Department of Transportation

## MAKING TRANSPORTATION MORE ACCESSIBLE

There are about one million persons in New Jersey who, because of their age or income or because of physical or mental handicaps, cannot use public transportation to the same extent as other citizens. These are our "transportation disadvantaged."

They represent a large segment of our population for whom the ability to use bus and rail transit for shopping, medical attention, recreation and other daily needs presents particular problems.

It is in recognition of their needs and of their right to enjoy the same benefits of society as other citizens that the New Jersey Department of Transportation is engaged in various programs to make public transportation more accessible to them. The programs include reduced fares, specially-equipped vehicles and the coordination of existing local services to make the services more effective.

## REDUCED FARES

The first of these programs began in 1973, when the State Legislature appropriated funds to offset the cost of permitting the elderly to ride public transit at reduced fares; in 1976 the program was expanded to include handicapped persons. Enrollment has risen to more than 450,000, about 40 percent of those eligible, and this year the subsidy will amount to $4 million.

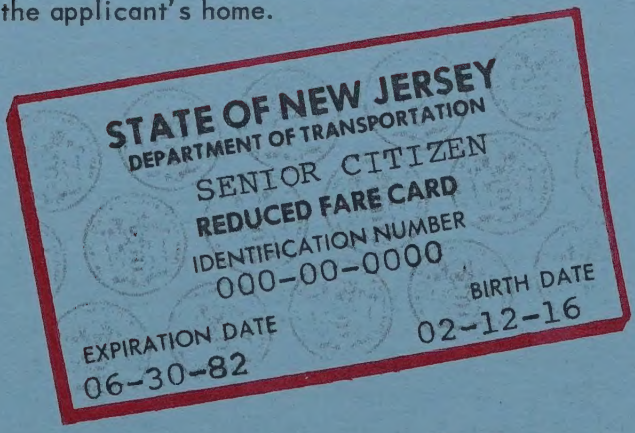
Under the reduced fare program, persons 62 years of age or older and handicapped persons may ride at lower fares during non-peak hours on all intrastate and virtually all interstate bus routes of New Jersey bus companies, as well as on all New Jersey trains operated by Conrail.

Handicapped persons are considered to be those who because of illness, injury, or various physical or mental disabilities are unable to use bus or rail services as easily as others.

The reduced fare is in effect on weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., and all day on Saturdays, Sundays and State holidays.

## HOW TO ENROLL

To enroll, a person 62 years old or over should take proof of age (birth certificate, driver's license or Medicare card) to a bank or county Office on Aging and fill out an application. The bank or county agency will forward the application to the Department's Office of Special Programs, which administers the program. A special identification card then will be mailed to the applicant's home.




Handicapped persons under 62 must enroll by writing to the Office of Special Programs to request an application form by mail. They then must take the form to their physician who will forward it to the Department processing.

With identification card, enrollees may obtain reduced-fare ticket books from their local bank. On boarding a bus, the ID card must be shown to the driver and a ticket must be presented together with the reduced fare. To travel by train, the ID card must be shown to the

ticket agent or conductor and the reduced one way fare paid.

## SPECIAL VEHICLES

Persons unable to use public transit because of advanced age or a severe handicap often are able to obtain transportation through private non-profit agencies which have received specialized vehicles, purchased with federal funds. The vehicles include station wagons, vans, small and large buses, some of which are equipped with lifts for those confined to wheelchairs.

Started in 1975, this program has resulted in the purchase by the Department of 164 vehicles for 103 organizations, and orders for 73 more vehicles which are earmarked for 68 organizations. Applications from qualified non-profit groups are received by the Office of Special Programs for future vehicle purchases.

In managing the program, the Department is aided by the Office on Aging of the Department of Community Affairs, the Division of Youth and Family Services of the Department of Human Services and county coordinating committees in selecting the organizations to receive the vehicles. This interdepartmental effort provides the expertise to identify the most needy programs.

After full review by the agencies involved, the most promising proposals for service are included in the State's application for federal funds from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA).

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## COORDINATION OF SERVICES

The Office of Special Programs has received a grant from UMTA to coordinate and consolidate the use of vehicles operated by public and

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private nonprofit social service agencies in each county. The objective is to provide the greatest possible number of door-to-door rides for transportation disadvantaged persons. In this effort, the Office works with county transportation coordinating committees, agencies operating the vehicles and with local public transit and taxicab companies who want to be included.

The Office encourages counties to use some of the highway funds they receive under the Federal Aid Urban System Program to purchase wheelchair lift vehicles and has promoted such projects as the distribution of signs requesting that priority be given to the elderly and handicapped for front seats in public transit buses.

For those who are unable to use public transit due to age or disability, the Office will refer specific questions or problems to other state agencies or appropriate local social serivce organizations.

## THE KNEELING BUS

Stepping on and off a bus is relatively easy for the average rider, but for an elderly person or one who has a physical handicap, the height of that first step can be an impassible barrier. To help remove this obstacle and make bus transit more accessible, an increasing number of buses with front steps that can be lowered -- the "kneeling" bus -- are being placed in service.

The Department has purchased 531 of these "kneeling" buses and through the Division of Bus Transportation Management, has put them in service with companies throughout the state. More will be acquired in future bus purchases. With this feature, the front end of the bus can be pneumatically lowered to bring the front step down from 11 inches to 5 inches from the ground.

Buses equipped with the kneeling feature are identified with a sign and a symbol to the

right of the front door and a passenger must ask the driver to lower the bus.

The elimination of other physical barriers which restrict the mobility of the elderly and handicapped also is of concern, and to meet this objective the Department installs depressed curbs at intersections and ramps at bus and rail terminals to make them more accessible.

## RURAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The Office of Special Programs administers a federal program which offers both operating and capital assistance for public transit in non-urbanized areas. County applicants design projects with technical assistance from the office. This enables people at the local level to design systems that will best meet the local needs.

## FUTURE GOALS

These efforts to aid the transportation disadvantaged are important steps toward the goal of maximum mobility. Achieving this goal will require the continued commitment and cooperation of both private and public agencies.

Further information on the New Jersey Department of Transportation's programs of services for the elderly and handicapped and for other transportation disadvantaged persons may be obtained by writing to the Office of Ridership Development, N.J. Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 101, 1035 Parkway Avenue, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, telephone (609) 292-3450.

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